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## Letters to Ladies: An Exploration of Nursing Leadership

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMMARY

### **Letters to Ladies Service Learning Executive Summary**

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NUR 4152: Professional Nursing 5

Dr. Erla Champ-Gibson

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### **Abstract**

This project was created by a group of five nursing students at Seattle Pacific University's Lydia Green School of Nursing with the goal of collecting 100 handwritten letters to distribute to the women's day center. The members of this day center have experienced changes in mental health and a lack of connectedness to their community due to COVID-19 related changes. The aim of this project was to encourage and connect with the women of the shelter during COVID-19 restrictions. Several on campus departments and clubs as well as local churches participated in writing letters that were collected and delivered to the women of the day center. Altogether, the women of the day center expressed positive emotions towards the letters and felt more connected as a result of the outreach.

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### **Letters to Ladies**

The day center is a women's shelter located in Belltown, Seattle, that focuses on providing women in need with temporary shelter so that they may transition into permanent housing. The members of the day center experience a wide variety of issues that the day center offers assistance with, such as mental health issues, substance abuse, trauma, and so on. These women are also experiencing exacerbated mental health issues and a loss of community due to COVID-19 related changes. They offer resources such as group therapy, access to mental health professionals, medical services, hygiene products, meals, bathroom and shower access, and referrals to community services. Our goal is to positively impact the mental health of the women at the day center by facilitating meaningful connection between the organization participants and their local community. To do this, we will provide 100 handwritten letters of encouragement from communities at SPU.

### **Background**

The day center relies heavily on both outside partnership funds and volunteers to keep their organization functioning and afloat. Many of their women outside of their shelter and into hotels due to COVID-19 space restrictions. They have shifted from housing over 100 women in person at their shelter to approximately 40. Many of the members at the shelter have had to change and adapt to these new restrictions. One of the main changes they have experienced is the move from in person classes, therapies, and resources, to online ones. As reported to us by our contact at the day center, this has impacted their mental health greatly. It is hard for the members to feel connected to others through zoom.

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### **Activities with Rationale**

Due to the observed hardships that the members of the day center are currently dealing with, we as a group wanted to foster connectedness to their community and offer encouragement. We provided 100 handwritten letters to the women at the day center to better their mental health and assist in feelings of connection to their community. In the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been an increase in depression and anxiety, especially in populations without access to resources. The individuals especially at risk are: “...people with pre-existing physical and mental health conditions (such as anxiety, depression, and obsessive-compulsive disorder) ...people with drug and/or alcohol use disorders...people living alone with limited social capital and support network” (Razai et al, 2020). As stated by our contact at the day center, a majority of their members fit this description. Non-medical interventions such as community engagement have shown to be effective for positively impacting mental health when social interaction is at a deficit (Razai et al., 2020). By providing the community with a COVID safe method to connect with and support members of the day center community, we hope to improve the mental well-being of the women in the shelter. This also allowed the residents of Seattle and students, staff, and faculty of SPU to have the opportunity to support those in need.

Eight departments in total participated in this project, of varying subjects including but not limited to Theology, Ministries, Psychology, Student Health Sciences, and Language. Each of these departments mission is to help improve people’s physical, mental and spiritual health and to work to provide equal opportunities to all people not limited to ethnic backgrounds, resources ability or ability to speak English. By contacting varying departments, we are able to connect with different specialties and passions within SPU to diversify our project participants. We provided detailed information to each department about participation and requirements for

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this opportunity. Additionally, we contacted members of the community, such as family friends and local churches, to increase our projects' partnership with the community. We desired to provide letters in both English and Spanish (the other language spoken by a majority of members) to make this project accessible to all women at the shelter. These efforts to gather a variety of letters for a multitude of SPU departments would support our goal diversifying the content and background of the letters provided. These emails sent included specific instructions on what information to include and not include in the letters as well as various writing prompts (See Appendix A). The letters will be arranged on site with a drop box and a frame with a brief description on the project and team members (See Appendix B).

To evaluate the effectiveness of our project, we provided small surveys with our letters, with one survey in each envelope, to allow for feedback from the women of the day center (See Appendix C). By doing this, the members of the day center were able to voice their thoughts and feelings about the project and the letter they received. This supports our goal by viewing how mental health at the shelter was impacted and how we can tailor the project differently in the future to better help members.

To promote sustainability within this project, we communicated with the departments at SPU and provide them with a one-page resource to continue this project (See Appendix D). This one-page resource was given to them after we received their letters on February 10th, 2021. With this resource, they will be able to continue providing letters to the day center by way of an extra credit project or just a community service opportunity. We aspire for this project to be maintained, since our ultimate goal is to combat social isolation and foster community within the members of the day center, beyond winter quarter.

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### Outcomes

Our first outcome goal was to receive at least 100 handwritten letters from various SPU departments and communities. A limitation to this is that we may not have received the letters, due to the fast approaching deadline or distance learning. To avoid this limitation, we planned to make sending and receiving letters as accessible as possible. We placed a collection box in the SPU School of Health Sciences front office for letter drop off by SPU participants. If a handwritten letter cannot be written, our group planned to receive a typed letter and hand write on the participants' behalf. After our two deliveries to the day center, we sent over 160 handwritten letters to the shelter, and therefore our goal was met.

The second outcome we achieved was to promote social connection secondary to COVID-19 related hardships within the members of the day center. We evaluated this by studying the returned surveys that were provided with our letters. Some limitations to this were that the women may not fill out any surveys or that they are not clear in their answers. To avoid this limitation, we sent surveys along with the letters in a small convenient format that includes only 5 yes or no questions that took little time to fill out. We also spoke with our contact after the letters were delivered to hear about possible subjective changes in member morale.

The third outcome we wish to see is the continuation of this project past winter quarter by classes or departments here at SPU, such as the Lydia Green School of Nursing cohorts and the Active Minds SPU Club. It would be to the discretion of the professors, faculty, or students who wish to prolong the letter writing past our group's period of leadership, which would be a limitation to the continuation of this project. To combat this, we provided a one-page resource to each professor that voices interest, giving them details on how to write and/or deliver their letters past winter quarter.

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Lastly, our group reevaluated effects of this project on women within the shelter by speaking to our contact and reading the surveys received. We received in total eight surveys back from the members of the day center. Every survey displayed positive feelings towards the project, many voicing that they hope to see the project continued. We read comments such as how the project “stirred my heart” or “was amazing” to be on the receiving end of. Our contact voiced that the women at the shelter were excited to receive their letters and enjoyed reading them. This outcome supports our goal of making a difference in feelings of connectedness and mental health deficits in this time.

## Conclusion

The women at the day center shelter in Belltown, Seattle, have been negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, especially due to the pre-existing mental health conditions that many of the women suffer from. They have had to adapt in many ways to new forms of communication and socializing, which has been difficult on the members. Many of the women voiced that zoom calls have resulted in decreased privacy in the shelter and decreased social connection. In order to connect the women with their community and offer personalized encouragement, students at SPU and members of the Seattle community are writing 100 handwritten letters to be delivered to the day center. By doing this, we saw a positive difference in the women’s mental health and alleviated some of the social isolation that they have been experiencing. We measured our goal by analyzing the surveys that were filled out and returned to us to evaluate how the members of the shelter were impacted.



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**References**

- Razai, M. S., Oakeshott, P., Kankam, H., Galea, S., & Stokes-Lampard, H. (2020, May 21).  
Mitigating the psychological effects of social isolation during the covid-19 pandemic.  
*BMJ*, 2020; 369:m1904. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.m1904>
- Toney-Butler, T. J. & Thayer, J. M. (2020, July 10). Nursing process. *StatPearls [Internet]*.  
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK499937/>

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## Appendix A

Parts one and two of the two sided frame display provided to the agency detailing project goal and purpose. Display also describes instructions for submitting surveys, as well as shows team members with encouraging words. This frame was provided to the agency on 2/10/2021.



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## Appendix B

Document provided to all interested persons who contacted team members within the time frame (January 14-February 24, 2021). Document details expectations of every submitted letter and rules of submission.

### *Letters to Ladies*

**If you were feeling isolated and struggling to connect with your community, what would you want to hear?** We are providing the ladies at Angeline's women's shelter with letters of encouragement to help them get through this hard time in our community. Handwritten letters are appreciated, but if you are unable to handwrite and deliver to your professor, feel free to email your letter to them and it will be handwritten for you. **There is no size limit (as long as it can fit in a 5x7 envelope). Do not be afraid to be creative!** We are trying to provide these women with hope and peace.

***What to focus on***

- Words of encouragement
- Prayer (if applicable)
- Little things in life that bring you joy
- Quotes or bible verses that bring you peace
- What helps you with your mental health
- Ways to relax and practice mindfulness or spirituality

***Some ideas to include***

- First name
- Hobbies/interests
- Easy DIY project instructions
- Things that bring you peace, like instructions for yoga poses, deep breathing, mindfulness, etc.
- Things that bring you joy
- Favorite things about Seattle
- Add personality! Feel free to decorate and add color to your letter
- Favorite recipes that are cheap and easy (little to no prep)

***What to avoid***

- Last names
- Personal identifiers (first name is okay)
- Personal addresses
- Negativity
- Stereotypes or assumptions about individual
- Triggering words/phrases/situations
  - Avoid talking about COVID, families, trauma, suicide, substance use, dark mental health issues, money, things that may not be widely accessible (TV, movies, kitchens, education, housing, etc.)
  - Note that many of these women are homeless and struggle with mental health
- Asking personal questions about their history

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## Appendix C

Survey provided with every given letter to the agency. Surveys provided with a drop box for ease of collection. Survey also provided in Spanish for readability and accessibility.

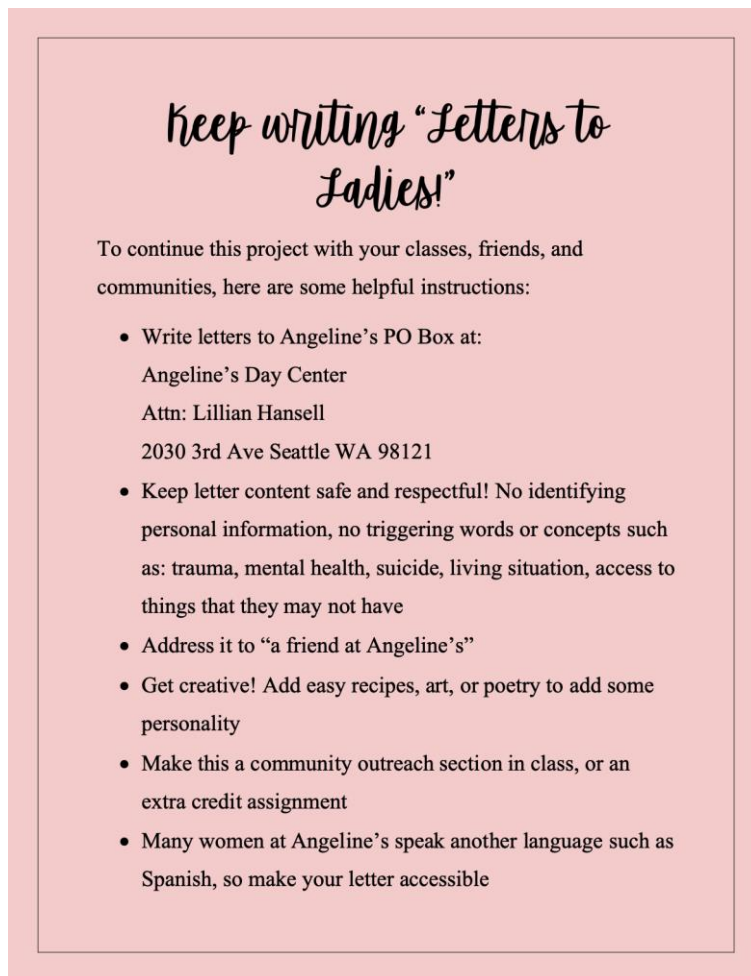
<b>SPU Letter Feedback</b>			
We would appreciate your honest feedback about your letter. This feedback survey is completely optional but greatly appreciated!			
	Agree	Disagree	Unsure/N/A
I enjoyed receiving and reading this letter.			
I felt encouraged and/or supported after receiving this letter.			
Would you like to receive more letters like this in the future?			
Comments:			

<b>SPU Letter Feedback</b>			
Le agradeceríamos sus comentarios honestos sobre la carta que recibo. Esto es completamente opcional.			
	Estoy de acuerdo	No estoy de acuerdo	Insegura
Me gusto recibir y leer esta carta			
Me sentí apoyada y motivada después de recibir esta carta			
Le gustaría recibir más cartas en el futuro?			
Comentarios (opcional):			

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## Appendix D

Document provided to all community members and SPU departments who partnered in creating letters with subsequent details regarding how to continue writing and sending letters to the day center after this project is concluded. Document includes details, tips, and guidelines regarding what to include and not to include in letters as well as the day center's mailing address.



*Keep writing "Letters to Ladies!"*

To continue this project with your classes, friends, and communities, here are some helpful instructions:

- Write letters to Angeline's PO Box at:  
Angeline's Day Center  
Attn: Lillian Hansell  
2030 3rd Ave Seattle WA 98121
- Keep letter content safe and respectful! No identifying personal information, no triggering words or concepts such as: trauma, mental health, suicide, living situation, access to things that they may not have
- Address it to "a friend at Angeline's"
- Get creative! Add easy recipes, art, or poetry to add some personality
- Make this a community outreach section in class, or an extra credit assignment
- Many women at Angeline's speak another language such as Spanish, so make your letter accessible